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Des montagnes en crise : quelles réponses par l'innovation sociale ?

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Introduction

- 1 In several Alpine countries, the response to vulnerable groups' social needs has traditionally been the responsibility of government organizations. However, in response to shrinking public financial resources, non-traditional actors (e.g. social cooperatives and social enterprises) started to design and test new models ten years ago to address growing social needs (Borzaga *et al.* 2014). Eschewing government involvement, social groups have invented new types of services/products, organizational processes and social practices in the form of new collaborations and personal interactions promoting *niche* initiatives of social innovation (SI). Many of these models can also be seen as offering the opportunity to further enhance local and regional development in small mountain communities (Mulgan, 2007; Baker and Mehmood, 2015; Bock, 2016).
- 2 In the literature, the concept of SI has been widely explored. In this paper we use the definition of the Horizon 2020 project Social Innovation in Marginalised Rural Areas (SIMRA www.simra-h2020.eu) that defines SI as “[...] the reconfiguring of social practices, in response to societal challenges, which seeks to enhance outcomes on societal well-being and necessarily includes the engagement of civil society actors” (Polman *et al.*, 2017).
- 3 SI is a process of social change i.e., attitudes, behaviors or perceptions (Neumeier, 2016; Howaldt, 2015) associated with collective actions that is expected to provide outcomes on societal well-being. (Baker and Mehmood, 2015). SI has been widely used in research

and practice across many fields due to its capacity to find innovative solutions that are likely to deliver societal value (Moulaert 2013; BEPA 2013). In this paper we are particularly interested in analyzing SI in two areas: a) the socio-economic integration of refugees; and b) the increase of employment opportunities for women farmers in areas characterized by forms of marginalization (physical and socio-economic marginalization). Solutions to these problems have offered opportunities to promote social agriculture and eco-tourism.

- 4 Academics who have analyzed SI initiatives relating to refugees in mountain contexts explored mainly how socio-economic integration of migrants can promote local development (e.g. Gretter et al., 2017; Perlik and Membretti, 2018). Similarly, literature that investigates the role of women in SI explores issues of women's empowerment and women as an agent for innovation in the diversification of agricultural revenues (Maestripieri, 2017). None of the previous research have investigated SI as a complex process of reconfiguring social practices influenced by territorial contextual factors and actors' characteristics.
- 5 By means of two case studies, the article aims to: (1) analyse the reconfiguration of social practices (i.e., attitudes) and the mechanisms of social change that social innovation brings about; (2) explain the role played by SI in promoting societal well-being and a broader cultural change; and (3) reflect on how mountain-related characteristics may influence SI development.
- 6 To analyse social innovation, we use a structure-agency framework. Here, SI emerges from the actions of individuals who operate within the enabling and constraining conditions of their own social, economic, environmental and institutional environments to reconfigure social practices that seek to improve outcomes on societal well-being (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). SI is seen both as a process of change resulting from the dialectic relationship between agency (i.e., actors' capacity to change social structures) and structure (i.e., resources and factors that empower or contain agents' behaviour) and as outcomes. To examine how resources enable or constrain actors' capacity to act, we use a neo-endogenous development approach. This recognizes the importance of extra local resources (e.g. external knowledge and expertise) but views development as resulting from local resources and driven by local collective action. On this basis, local development exploits local resources; focuses on local needs, capacities and perspectives; and fosters local participation in the design and implementation of development via cultural, environmental and community values (Ray, 2006).
- 7 The underlying hypothesis is that social innovations led by the third sector not only produce outcomes on societal well-being but change attitudes in a transformative way (e.g. how society perceives vulnerable groups such as refugees and women). The questions we want to answer are: What characterizes the process of reconfiguring social practices? What are the outcomes of social innovation on community well-being? What are the qualifying mountain-related factors that influence SI initiatives in our cases? To answer these questions, the study uses a case-study approach based on qualitative information collected from semi-structured interviews. The paper is structured as follows: the next section presents the method and the criteria used to assess the case studies; section three presents the case study analysis; section four presents the main scientific results; session five analyses and discusses the main findings in an objective way.

Method and data

- 8 The paper adopts a case study approach to analyze SI in mountain areas. The sample is small but well suited to our qualitative research design as it considers specific local factors affecting the SI reconfiguration process (Yin, 2009). To select the cases, we asked two experts in the field of social innovation and local development if they knew any exemplary cases and two were selected based on the following **criteria**: a) addressing vulnerable groups' social needs; b) social engagement; c) reconfiguration of existing social practices; d) outcomes on societal well-being; e) located in an area of the Italian Alps.
- 9 Information on the cases was collected using a qualitative approach based on **semi-structured interviews**. Desk research and document analysis were also used to collect information on the socio-economic context. In each case, three semi-structured interviews with the key actors in the SI initiatives were conducted, including the innovators, project managers and beneficiaries. Innovators were interviewed to gain information about the trigger and motivation behind the idea, the vision, and the other actors involved in the initiative. Project partners (i.e., project managers, coordinators) were interviewed to obtain information about the implementation of the project and its outcomes. The interviews with the beneficiaries served to gather knowledge on their involvement in the initiative and the benefits they gained from it. A semi-structured interview guideline was developed to collect information about the enabling and hindering factors of SI, characteristics of SI implementation and its outcomes. The interviews lasted approximately 30 to 90 minutes depending on the interviewee's level of involvement. All interviews, apart from that of one beneficiary in Case A, were recorded. Notes and direct quotations were extracted using **qualitative content analysis** (Mayring, 2000). **Limits of the study are twofold: first**, it reflects the view of the interviewees, which for the limited number of interviews can be considered explorative; it was not possible to perform additional interviews to beneficiaries and to other stakeholders and further investigate how local government promotes/obstructs the rise of SI. This could have provided a broader insight into the process of change.
- 10 The four key dimensions of SI as defined in the SIMRA project (Secco *et al.* 2017) that are relevant to our case study analysis are: structure/context, agency, reconfiguring and outcomes. **Structure/context** refers to the existing set of contextual material and immaterial resources (e.g. natural, financial, social, and cultural) that enables or constrains SI. **Agency** is the actors' capacity to mobilize and transform existing resources. It consists of a) the actors' characteristics, ideas, values and capacity for change; b) preparation for implementing the SI initiative and the reconfiguration of social practices. The process of **reconfiguring** refers to changes in social and institutional practices such as new governance arrangements (e.g. policies, laws), networks (e.g. structure or composition) and new attitudes (e.g. social roles in the promotion of cultural values, beliefs). The **outcomes** are behavioural changes resulting from the SI initiative that promote new routines, decisions, rules and institutions. They are the mid-term effects that affect direct beneficiaries of the SI initiative. For each, key elements of analysis were identified, which are reported in Table 1 in the Appendix.

Table 1. Criteria for the analysis of structure/context, agency, reconfiguring, outcomes

Dimensions	Criteria	Key elements of analysis
Structure/ Context	Natural capital	Existing land, landscape
	Financial capital	EU, regional, national, local policies
	Human capital	Professional skills: education, knowledge, experiences Traditions: shared norms, customs, habits, values, cultural identity
	Social capital	Social inclusion, solidarity, exchange of information, networks, trust, cooperation, social life, knowledge exchange/social learning, participation, collective action, collaboration attitudes
Agency	Actors	Type of actors: local, external; individual or collective
		Characteristics of actors: age, gender, education, reputation, job position, ethnicity
		Actors' specific values and ideas referring to beliefs, morals, ethics
		Capacity to act for change: leadership, willingness to act, motivation, diverse cultural and knowledge systems
		Opponents: who, their actions, reason for their actions
	Preparatory actions	Availability of resources: human (skills, experience and competence), social (existing relations), economic (money, time)
		Idea formulation: expectations, social vision
		Identification of stakeholder or partners
		Information collection: types of business model, finding consultants, introducing the idea in meetings, identification of availability of resources and, raising awareness by communicating the idea (narrative building)
	Characteristics of agency	Type of agency: local, cross-scale, cross-level interaction with other organization/endogenous, neo-endogenous, exogenous
Reconfiguring	Reconfiguring	Location
		Duration: Long or short
		Instruments used for functioning
		Instruments used for formalization

		Expectations
		Factors that support, hinder or interrupt SI
		Individual and collective attitudes
	Reconfigured	What has been changed: social practices before and after the process
Outcomes	Effectiveness	Effects of the initiative on direct beneficiaries: changes in the lives of individuals, families, or at community level
	Duration	Mid-term or long term effects

Case studies

- 11 Two cases were selected that deal with unmet social needs of two vulnerable groups (e.g. refugees and women). They are in two provinces of the Italian Alps (i.e., Brescia and Bolzano; Fig. 1), which present different socio-economic and geographical conditions but show similar SI development. Hence, they exhibit interesting contextual factors to study the SI process and the social changes it brings about. Case Study A is the initiative “Eco World Hotel Giardino”, started in 2012 by the social cooperative K-Pax. It aims at the socio-economic integration of refugees into the municipality of Breno, Val Camonica (Brescia, Lombardy). The mountain characteristic that qualifies the case relates to the reopening of a historical touristic infrastructure in a declining mountain destination. In Case Study A we analyse the involvement of refugees and new management styles where employees work for both the cooperative and the hotel. The initiative exploits the leverage of high-quality eco-tourism, recognized as an asset in Alpine areas. Case Study B is the initiative of childcare services on sparsely located farms in South Tyrol. It started in 2006 by the social cooperative “Learning-Growing-Living with women farmers”. The mountain characteristic that qualifies the case relates to innovating mountain farming. In Case Study B we analyze women’s entrepreneurship in terms of the lack of professional opportunities for women farmers, and the cooperative management of the delivery of childcare services. The initiative exploits the advantages of mountain assets such as quality of food, water, air and landscape for the delivery of quality childcare services. Case A was also studied as a best practice of migrant integration (Membretti *et al.* 2017); Case B was selected as an analytical case of the SIMRA project.

Fig.1. Map showing locations of Case A and B



Results

Eco World Hotel Giardino (Case A)

- 12 **Structure/Context:** The economic context of Val Camonica shows a decline in traditional small-scale local enterprises, due to low multi-sectoriality and extreme specialization, and low product and service innovation (Bagliani & Pietta, 2013). Some municipalities have long been excluded from the process of tourism development and there has been little interest in cooperation among institutions or networking between public and private actors (Governa, 2008). More recently, in accordance with the migrant distribution quotas set by the Ministry of the Interior, refugees have been relocated to peripheral areas of Italy to reduce pressure on urban centers (Barbera, 2016). This has resulted in mountain municipalities having higher rates (30%) of refugees and asylum seekers per inhabitant than non-mountainous ones (Di Gioia, 2018). Local residents, living in communities affected by demographic decline and social and employment issues, have a very negative perception of refugees very negatively as they appear to be the only ones benefiting from public assistance and social services (Dematteis & Di Gioia, 2018).
- 13 **Agency:** The board members of the social cooperative K-Pax are considered the agency of the initiative. By coordinating the reception of refugees and asylum seekers in 2010-2011 in Val Camonica, K-Pax recorded an economic plus value in 2012. The availability of financial resources made it possible to rent and then buy the Hotel Giardino at a low price. The unused hotel is a historical tourist building and a cultural symbol for the municipality of Breno. K-Pax's specific needs were: a) finding a better

location for the cooperative headquarters; and b) re-investing the capital gains/profit in a project of “generative welfare” (Zancan, 2014). K-Pax collective addressed: a) the revitalization of a declining touristic infrastructure; and b) refugees’ social and labor integration. The project to remodel the hotel was part of the social cooperative’s broader vision to stimulate community welfare and empower refugees. K-Pax was able to use tourism as a socio-economic driver thanks to their thorough understanding of the local context, their economic knowledge and their awareness of the feasibility/viability of the project. The K-Pax president knew the Hotel Giardino very well, his family once having managed it. The network was also able to use a range of skills and human resources to remodel and manage the hotel: local artisans were used to refurbish the hotel and teach their skills to the involved refugees. The use of different expertise led to a combined management of the hotel and the cooperative, a blend of and a cooperative entrepreneurial mindset. K-Pax adopted an open, cooperative management style for the hotel, like that of the social cooperative, enabling the influx of skills.

- 14 Before the start of the initiative in 2012, actual demonstrations of intolerance and violence were organized by extremist groups opposed to migrants’ integration (Sempredon, 2017). The local population and administration did not trust the project and did not believe a social cooperative capable of managing a hotel. Internally, members of the cooperative did not like carrying out the hotel management tasks’ as they were not part of a cooperative’s work. There was disagreement among the staff as some viewed entering a new market negatively, thus putting solidarity at risk.
- 15 **Reconfiguring:** The first refugees arrived after the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War in 2011. From the beginning of 2012, K-Pax started to employ local refugees in the hotel renovation and management, at a time when the local population was worried by immigration. K-Pax believed this new project would have a positive effect on refugees’ socio-economic integration in the local community and refugees would be valuable human resources for the hotel. K-Pax recognized the hotel’s high artistic and cultural value and the promise of a renaissance of tourism in the area. They therefore renovated the hotel in collaboration with local artisans, following ecological principles and using short value chain suppliers. In doing so, it broke the image of the non-profit cooperative only providing assistance and embraced a business management style, albeit on a non-profit basis and with a social and ethical motivation. This aspect of the reconfiguring process was important as the cooperative’s mission had to remain enhancing the skills of vulnerable groups. Staff members understood the strength of the project and supported it, while the local population changed its opinion after evaluating the performance of the hotel, which they now saw as a cultural and social center.
- 16 **Outcomes:** The initiatives have seen refugees employed long term at the hotel, with 9 refugees socially and economically integrated in the last 5 years. Hotel management has become a much appreciated skill. An informal network for labor integration was created among the hotel’s suppliers. Today the hotel has regained its position as an important tourist facility for the valley, substantially increasing its overnight stays compared to the previous management, and as a cultural meeting place for the whole community. Broadly, it has changed the role of refugees from beneficiaries of assistance services to an actor contributing to local development.

Learning-Growing-Living with women farmers (Case B)

- 17 **Structure/Context:** Although South Tyrol is an economically thriving Italian province, with the highest GDP per capita in the country, agriculture in the remote mountain valleys is small-scale and family-based, and farmers require additional income to supplement low revenues from agriculture (Hoffmann and Streifeneder, 2013). Besides agro-tourism, another example of multi-functionality is the provision of childcare services to farms (Di Iacovo, O'Connor, 2009) in remote rural areas. The morphology of these areas negatively affects the efficient provision of social services, especially in the most remote settlements, such as the traditional high mountain farms (*Bergbauernhöfe*). The lack of basic services in such areas leads to the abandonment of the most inaccessible farms. In mountain areas, women farmers play a key role in passing on traditional knowledge and practices regarding farming and rural lifestyle. Nevertheless, they are still considered a vulnerable group, because “as the presence of market economies strengthens, there is likely to be dramatically less decision-making power accorded to women. Women become in effect heads of households, but with only limited access to credit, agricultural extension, and other services” (Byers & Sainju, 1994).
- 18 **Agency:** The founder (innovator) of the initiative of the “Learning, Growing, Living with Women Farmers” social cooperative is the former spokesperson of South Tyrol’s women farmers. The agency also comprises the Women Farmers of South Tyrol’s network. The innovator also involved the director of a local Agricultural College in the network, who helped design the training courses for women farmers willing to provide childcare on their farms. The agency’s motivation came from the idea to improve women farmers’ economic and professional situation. The initiative emerged in response to the individual needs of the innovator to be an entrepreneur. At the same time it responded to the collective need to create a childcare service on farms for parents wanting to raise their children in a rural environment. The motivation was strengthened by the awareness that there was no similar organization in Europe with a focus on women’s entrepreneurship. The core value characterizing the agency was the recognition of the importance of providing training and professional opportunities for women farmers to enable them to become more independent. Trust among all network members also characterized the agency. The network knew that the innovator was very persistent and goal-oriented. The suggestions received by the members of the network in 2006 led to the founding of the social cooperative. To start to implement the idea they submitted a project to the European Social Fund in 2007, which was actually granted funding.. When the innovator presented the project to women farmers, they were not very supportive as they did not believe this would genuinely change their socio-economic situation. The innovator and network members personally called several women and convinced them to attend the training course to become childcare providers.
- 19 **Reconfiguring:** Although the network had some initial difficulties, they continued to believe in their idea. Many have worked voluntarily for its implementation. A very important decision that contributed to the success of the project was to open the initiative to other rural women who were more motivated to initiate childcare than the women farmers. The cooperative’s work aimed at strengthening the women’s social status by increasing the societal value of the profession of a childminder on the farm.

The agency has managed to motivate women farmers to undertake childcare on their farm in order to become more autonomous. The positive reaction from the community to the delivery of childcare has encouraged more women farmers to become providers. Strategical internal decisions were important for the success of the initiative: the social cooperative kept its independence from the Main Farmers Union, which is mainly composed of male farmers, in order to make important decisions autonomously. This meant taking on greater responsibility as a cooperative. The work to improve the standard conditions of collective contracts was also an important step in terms of enhancing women farmers' social security. Thanks to the different steps in the reconfiguring process, 10 years after the initiative's launch, childcare on the farm has become an enterprise model. At first it was a decision that a woman took herself despite her husband's opposition. It has now become a decision taken together as a family. The women farmers' role has been transformed: the woman enjoys greater responsibility and duties on the farm, economic independence and security and decision-making about the farm's strategies. The process has also changed how the community perceives the farm, which has evolved into a place of social and cultural exchange, offering a new setting for environmental education. The Main Farmers Union, which was initially skeptical about the idea, now follows the activities of the social cooperative with great enthusiasm'.

- 20 **Outcome:** After 10 years the cooperative now employs over 100 women providing childcare on their farms to over 500 children throughout South Tyrol. The founding of the social cooperative has contributed substantially to the quality of life in the mountains. Childcare on the farm has been integrated into traditional childcare services, providing a flexible option for working mothers and enhancing the transmission of traditional and cultural rural values. Moreover, the farm has become a place of professionalization for women farmers, who now enjoy economic independence, a specific role on the farm, and family acknowledgement. Childcare is recognized as an activity that supports the farm's income.

Figure 2. Schema showing the social innovation process of the Eco World Hotel Giardino (Case A)

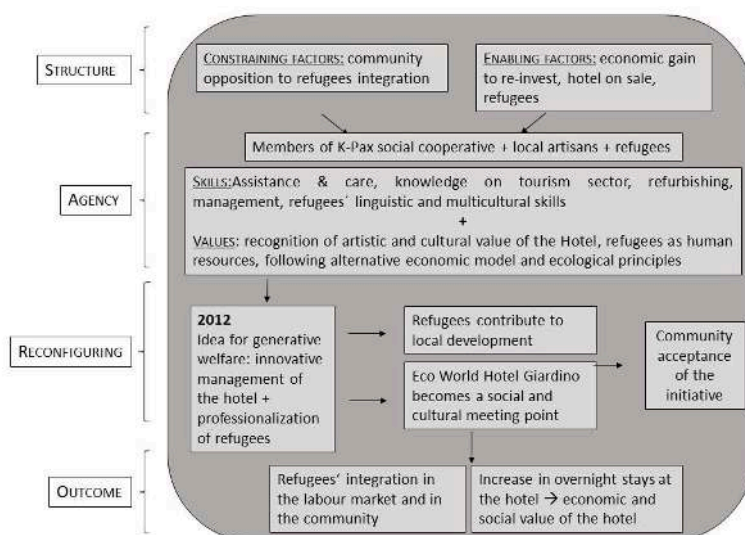
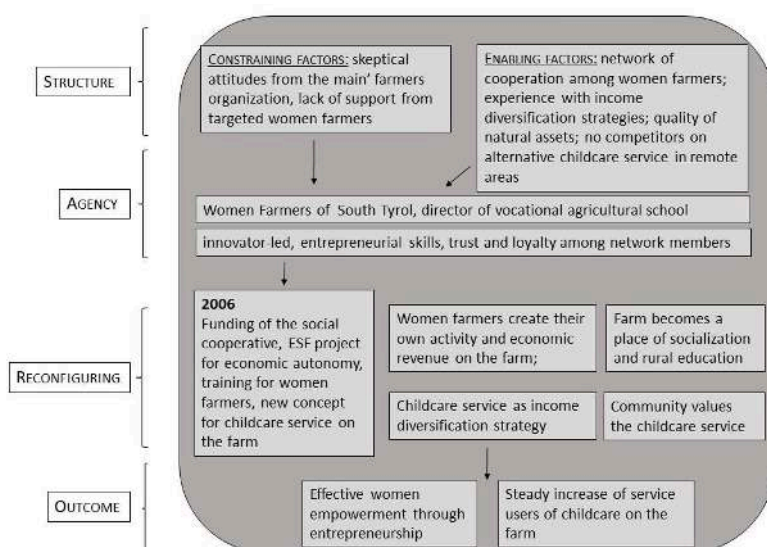


Figure 3. Schema showing the social innovation process of the Learning-Growing-Living with women farmers (Case B)



Discussion: changes in social attitudes as driver of social transformations

- 21 The cases analyzed above demonstrate the collective process of the reconfiguration of existing social practices, the influencing factors and the improved outcomes on community well-being. These are essential elements of SI (Polman et. al. 2017; Mulgan, 2007).
- 22 The socio-economic contextual dimensions (**structure/context**) that enable SI show that SI is embedded in specific socio-political and socio-economic contexts (Mouleart and Sekia 2003); each SI is place- and path- specific geographical, territorial, social, economic and institutional factors (Goodwin, 2003). Among the mountain-related dimensions that influence SI we identified the most relevant for the two cases. The geographical specificities such as remoteness, sparsity and the limited provision of basic services (Price et al. 2017) acted as *drivers* of SI in Case B - Learning-Growing-Living with women farmers. Remoteness and sparsity led women farmers to develop an innovative service to overcome their local limitations. Demographic change such as immigration acted as drivers of SI in case study A- Eco World Hotel Giardino. Strong social capital and a long tradition of economic cooperation *enabled* SI. Our findings confirm that SI is driven by collective action originating from a strong social capital where cooperation is important. Our study is consistent with Putnam's (1993) definition of social capital: i.e., features of social organizations, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits. In addition, strong ties based on mutual acquaintances, recognition and trust were relevant in shaping members' community ties and their capacity to act (Bhatt and Altinay, 2013). Finally, the capacity of mountain communities with strong territorial attachment to adapt to structural modifications of the economy has *enhanced* SI. The two cases use new production/economic/managing models to revitalize traditional economic sectors (e.g. eco-tourism and social agriculture), the uniqueness of mountain

symbols/heritage (i.e., farm and hotel) and re-interpret a traditional set of values (i.e., rural lifestyle), and in so doing improve community well-being.

- 23 In both cases the actors (**agency**) recognized the importance of different sets of cultural values offering a new service, new forms of organization, and a new employment schema. They promote collaboration, engaging the beneficiaries in the process, improving their access to resources and giving them the power to act. In accordance with Grimm et al. (2013) and Pestoff & Brandsen (2009), social innovation is not merely target oriented, but involves cooperation, coproduction, democratization and interaction. However, there are also interesting SI initiatives in which the third sector produces services in cooperation with public administration, promoting co-governance practices (Nyssens, 2006).
- 24 Our findings show that the **reconfiguration of social practices**, i.e., attitudes, led to social change in both cases - i.e., society's perception of refugees and women farmers. The actors use internal and external resources to challenge existing contexts and traditional roles (i.e., gender and refugees) as well as to revitalize traditional culture (i.e., rural life; hospitality; farms; touristic infrastructure). Through the determination of the actors, their beliefs, and new organizational models, they transformed the roles of women farmers and refugees in the community. Refugees benefiting from support services actively contribute to local development. Women farmers have become entrepreneurs and enjoy economic autonomy. Our findings are consistent with studies showing that SI is user-led, empowers local actors and offers a participatory response to social problems (Sinclair and Baglioni 2014). One might question if these changes of social roles are permanent. The level of acceptance of these initiatives and the local communities' responses vary over time and are influenced by both internal circumstances (e.g. willingness of residents to cooperate) and external factors (e.g. policies at different levels).
- 25 The **outcomes** of both initiatives have empowered people, not only those directly involved but also the wider community. They contributed to positive changes in attitudes and traditional sets of values (e.g. self-help, equality and solidarity), increasing the opportunities for social inclusion. In addition in both cases the activities and credibility of the organizations have further promoted social and economic opportunities (i.e., employment). Case A developed peer-to-peer relations with local enterprises, creating an informal network for the refugees' labour integration. Case B transformed childcare on the farm as a strategic choice for the diversification of agriculture and saw mainstream social agriculture as a reliable model for alternative social and education services in remote mountain areas. This is due to the agency being embedded in the local area and is consistent with the neo-endogenous development approach (Rey, 2006). But many successful SI initiatives promoting local and regional development are also led by exogenous resources, and external actors that facilitate development of social innovation, according to a top-down approach (Butkevičiene E. 2009)
- 26 Moreover, the cases show that SI initiatives were possible due to certain circumstances linked to existing policy, specific culture (i.e., values and beliefs) and specific contextual factors. What may interfere with the functioning of the case studies relates to changes in policy or lifestyle. In case A the critical factors are changes of migration policy at national level that may stop the influx of refugees and asylum seekers in reception centers in mountain municipalities. The project of the Eco World Hotel

Giardino is designed to be economically self-sufficient, as it was conceptualized as a generative welfare project. The absence of refugees would endanger K-Pax's mission. Due to its innovative management system, the Hotel would continue to function but would certainly no longer be a project of professionalization of refugees, and it would lose its multicultural and multilinguistic specificities. In Case B, the critical factor mainly relates to the current role of women as mother, farmer, educator and child minder. In some cases, the woman farmer takes on too much responsibility, providing childcare as well as working on the farm and her workload can become excessive. The increasing concern for a better work/life balance for women farmers may endanger the initiative's long term feasibility.

Conclusion

- 27 The article aimed to analyse the collective process of reconfiguration of social practices and the mountain-specific elements that influences SI initiatives. The focus was on testing the hypothesis that SI produces outcomes of societal well-being *and* changes the way society perceives the role of refugees and of women farmers. These represent examples of transformative processes of social change. For this scope, the paper analysed two examples of SI in two mountain contexts: the Eco World Hotel Giardino deals with the socio-economic integration of refugees in a mountain village; the Learning-Growing-Living with Women Farmers deals with women-led entrepreneurship on farms. Using a case study approach the information collected was used to assess the following Si dimensions: context, agency, reconfiguration of social practices and outcomes. Our results show that both cases mobilize endogenous and exogenous resources to challenge their specific contexts, re-interpret traditional cultural values and reconfigure social practices i.e., attitudes. The reconfiguration of social practices empowered two types of vulnerable groups and was able to tackle specific local problems and social needs, improving societal well-being. At the same time, it changed the way society perceived women farmers and refugees, thus confirming our hypothesis. In addition, our findings show that social innovation initiatives were important for successful local development because both cases created added value. The article stressed the site-specific aspects of social innovation; the importance of the community dimension; and the role of local actors in both identifying urgent social needs and questioning existing traditional beliefs and social roles.

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ABSTRACTS

Global trends such as international migration and large-scale agriculture are having an impact on the economy and society of Italy's mountain territories. Socio-economic challenges call for new solutions that existing public institutions and private local organizations fail to address properly. Social innovation (SI) has become a relevant paradigm to address social challenges. By reconfiguring existing social practices, it introduces new solutions (e.g. services, practices, cooperation models) to better respond to social needs, improving the wellbeing of mountain areas. In the paper, two initiatives were selected that target empowerment of vulnerable groups (refugees and women farmers). Using the agency-structure framework, an explorative study of these initiatives has been conducted to analyse the process of reconfiguring social practices, the outcomes, and the factors that may enable and hinder the initiatives. The results show that social innovation has transformed the meaning of cultural symbols and the socio-economic roles of the target groups, leading to an improvement of the whole community's wellbeing.

Les tendances mondiales telles que les migrations internationales et l'agriculture à grande échelle ont un impact sur la société et l'économie des territoires de montagne en Italie. Ici, les défis socio-économiques qui en découlent soulèvent de nouvelles problématiques que les institutions publiques et les organisations locales privées existantes ne parviennent pas à résoudre efficacement. L'innovation sociale (IS) est devenue un paradigme pertinent pour relever les défis sociétaux/les besoins sociaux. En reconfigurant les pratiques sociales existantes, elle introduit de nouvelles solutions (services, pratiques, modèles de coopération) pour mieux répondre aux besoins sociaux et améliorer le bien-être des populations dans les zones de montagne. Dans l'article, deux initiatives ont été sélectionnées. Elles visent l'autonomisation des groupes vulnérables (réfugiés et femmes agricultrices). Une étude exploratoire de ces cas a été menée en utilisant l'approche de "structure et agentivité", afin d'analyser le processus de reconfiguration des pratiques sociales, ses résultats et les facteurs spécifiques de montagne qui facilitent ou entravent les innovations sociales. Les résultats démontrent que l'innovation sociale a transformé la signification des symboles culturels et le rôle socio-économique des groupes cibles, en entraînant une amélioration du bien-être de l'ensemble de la communauté.

INDEX

Mots-clés: innovation sociale, développement local, intégration des réfugiés, autonomisation des agricultrices, Alpes italiennes

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